

## Sunday School

### PAUL ON SELF-DENIAL.

November 28, 1909. Romans 14: 10-21.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth.—Romans 14:21.

#### SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 83. Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?  
A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

#### DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Rom. 14:10-21. Th.—Rom. 13:7-14.  
T.—Rom. 15:1-7. F.—1 Cor. 8.  
W.—Matt. 18:1-11. S.—1 Peter 2:7-14.  
S.—1 Thes. 5:4-10.

#### TOPICAL OUTLINE.

How Paul Settled Difficult Church Problems—

By the thought of judgment to come, vs. 10-13.

By the example of Christ, vs. 14-18.

By an appeal to Christian love, vs. 19-21.

#### LESSON COMMENTS.

Rome was and has been through much of its long history probably the most cosmopolitan city in the world. Well nigh every nation under the sun has been represented there. At the time Paul wrote his great and justly famous letter to the Christian Church there, Rome was the throbbing center of the world. Every belief and every form of unbelief was contending for a standing place.

Out of this mixed and seething mass, the materials for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ were selected and called by the Spirit of God. The various and differing elements did not leave behind them all of their differentiating beliefs and prejudices when they entered the Church of the Lord Jesus. Each one Jew, gentile, worshipper of the true God, worshipper of false gods or of no gods, each one imported into the church some measure of his former self. This custom has not changed to this good day.

Nothing but the Truth poured into a mixture of elements so diverse could save the whole mass from self-destruction. "The Truth shall make you free." This was the Spirit's prescription for that church and it was compounded with love as the unifying force permeating the whole. This body of Truth administered by the hand of Paul is a marvel of completeness in its verbiage, its logic, its boldness and precision its comprehensiveness, its grace, its marks of heavenly birth and power. The student of this lesson should read and ponder well in the presence of God the entire letter. In so doing it will be seen that a few of the great and fundamental truths that he makes to stand out in great clearness and which lead naturally to a right and safe dealing with these widely differing elements in the church are (1) that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile in their standing before God. Both are on the same low level—both are sinners, hopelessly sinners. This is true albeit the Jew had the distinction of a great father, Abraham, of the national mark of circumcision, and of the fact that he was a depository of the oracles of God. (2) They were alike helpless and lost. There was no device, contrivance or work of theirs that could save any one of them in whole or in part. (3) They were alike in the fact that each accepted by the same empty grace the salvation that God had wrought through His Son. (4) They were alike in the fact that the inducements for their salvation were not seen in them but in God's own eternal purpose and electing love. (5) They were alike in their right to peace in Christ and their eternal, immovable safety.

Such one-ness in the conditions of sin and salvation put it out of all bounds of reason or right that one should arrogate anything to himself or discredit his brother or deliberately be or fail to be, do or fail to do what would build up and save his brother for whose salvation as well as for his own, Christ died.

The unmerited death of Christ, His free and great and eternal salvation, should lead the Jew and Gentile not only to a surrender of themselves, body as well as soul as a sacrifice (reasonable) to God, it should not only produce him as a submissive and loyal citizen in his kingdom or republic, it should lead him to have a care for his brother.

Just here we may easily see the main line of truth in the present lesson. Strange as it may seem to us now the question of food was at the fore front. The devout Jewish Christian had a lingering, but right obstinate belief that certain meats (unclean in Old Testament law) should not be eaten by a Jewish Christian, nor indeed by any Christian. The converted heathen who had worshipped all manner of false deities largely by eating meats that in the killing had been consecrated to some false divinity, now that he was a Christian, felt that no one could eat meat so consecrated without at least appearing to worship the god to whom the meat had been slaughtered. The fact on the one hand was that the one offering (death) of Christ had put an end to the distinction between clean and unclean meats and so the Jew was not shut up to eating just one line of meats; on the other hand was the fact that there is no false god and so in the light of the faith of the Son of God and His kingdom, eating meat or not eating had nothing whatever to do with the realities of the kingdom of God. These great and blessed realities were the purchased righteousness of the Lord Jesus, (received not by eating meat or drinking wine but by faith alone), peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. This last great position of liberty and peace and joy had already been realized by some of these Roman Christian and not unnaturally they were disposed to pay little heed to their brethren of smaller growth and so eat and drink as might appear legitimate and proper under their fuller light. The result was that the weaker brethren from among the Jews were beginning to doubt the sincerity of the stronger disciples and to speak evil of their good. On the other hand the heathen convert believed that the stronger brethren were really not strong but actually so weak as to hold on in part to their old worship of the false gods in whose honor they were still eating meat. So the good of the stronger brethren was evil spoken of on two sides. The result was of necessity hurtful to all.

1. **To the Strong.** First of all, be sure that your good be not evil spoken of by any. Probably some meat could be found the eating of which would be occasion of no blame or hurt. If not, eat no meat at all rather than forfeit the power of one's own personal influence. In the second place to claim and use one's rights in such case would not be a loving act to a weaker brother. Such a course would destroy the weaker brother's peace and joy and power were he to eat such meat. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" and sin is destructive.

This advice has a place in our day. There are many who could with impunity to themselves attend at least some kinds of theatres, play cards, drink wine and whiskey with entire moderation. But there are still many grades of Christian faith. Many are weak! Also the unsaved world is looking on. It is easy, fearfully easy for one's good to be so impaired, by claiming and using his rights of liberty, as to sink into a place of almost entire weakness and uselessness.

A young man was fighting a battle with strong drink. He was invited to a banquet. Wine was served. He saw the strong ones drink it. It did not hurt them personally; but that young man's dust is now in a cemetery in this State as a result.

**To the Weak:** Do not assume to judge your brother. God is his Judge and He will not fail to care for every such case. To his own Master he standeth or falleth. Each of us must stand before (not some man's judgment seat but) the judgment seat of Christ.

The weak brother by with-holding judgment and by patient examination can always secure help from a stronger brother, if he sincerely seeks edification, no matter from whose life it comes.

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What we need is not a new compass every year, but a new determination to steer straight by the old compass, which is the Word of God in Christ.—Henry Van Dyke.